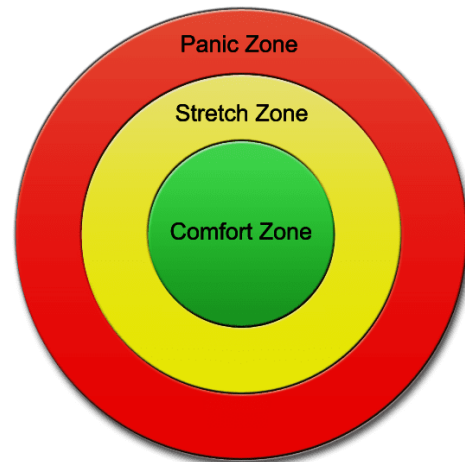


## Mrs Dowdell's Parenting Pointers

### Comfort Stretch Panic

Following on from last week's article about mental wellbeing, here's a model that has really helped me in recognising and managing anxiety. It's called "Comfort Stretch Panic" and this is how it works ...

We all have our comfort zones, places and situations where we generally feel relaxed, safe and in control. Your comfort zone may be different from my comfort zone but we all have them and they vary from person to person. One of us may find that being at home with family is our comfort zone, while others may find that situation extremely stressful. What's your comfort zone?



Then we have the stretch zone and it's here that we grow and learn. Our children are in the stretch zone every day when they are learning new ideas and concepts at school. The thing about the stretch zone is that it can be uncomfortable. As soon as we head out of our comfort zone, our bodies release chemicals (adrenaline, nor adrenaline, cortisol) which can cause some physical discomfort. Our instinct may be to retreat back to our comfort zone as quickly as possible. The challenge is that if we always retreat, we never grow or develop.

I have learnt to recognise when I'm in the stretch zone, to acknowledge that it may feel uncomfortable but to know that it's OK. The more we experience life in the stretch zone, the more resilient we become and our comfort zone begins to expand. Things that used to cause us to be anxious become easier. For example, I'm not a super confident driver, especially when I have to go to places I've never been before and even more so if I have to drive on the motorway. A few years ago a situation in our family meant that I had to make a weekly trip up the M3 to Basingstoke every Monday for several months. The first time I did this I was really anxious but with each trip I became a bit more confident. As a result of this, when I needed to drive my Mum to Norfolk to visit my brother and his family, I found myself able to do it. I knew it was a stretch but I knew from experience that a stretch can be good for me and can build my confidence. I was so proud of myself after I had driven us safely there and back again!



A brief word on the panic zone; we don't want to go there! We need to learn to recognise and be prepared to stretch but we need to do this a bit at a time. If someone had asked me the day I passed my driving test to drive 200 miles on roads I didn't know I would have run fast in the opposite direction! So, over the next week or so, let's be aware of when we are stretching, acknowledge that stretching is OK and challenge ourselves to have a go. You never know we might just enjoy it!

If you need to get in touch to discuss these ideas or anything else you can email me at [parenting@foundrylanprimary.co.uk](mailto:parenting@foundrylanprimary.co.uk)